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Śrīmad Bhāgavatam speaks of the highest goal of life, devotional service, and divine love of Krishna. According to all the Vedas *Śrīmad Bhāgavatam* is the very form of divine love. The four Vedas are like yogurt, but the *Śrīmad Bhāgavatam* is like butter. The churner of this butter is Sukadeva Goswami, and the eater of this butter is Parikshit Maharaja.

— Caitanya Bhāgavata, Madhya Lila, 22.15-16



Features

WHO IS A MAHĀ-BHĀGAVATA?

His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada



DID HUMANS CREATE RELIGION?

Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Saraswati Thakur Prabhupada



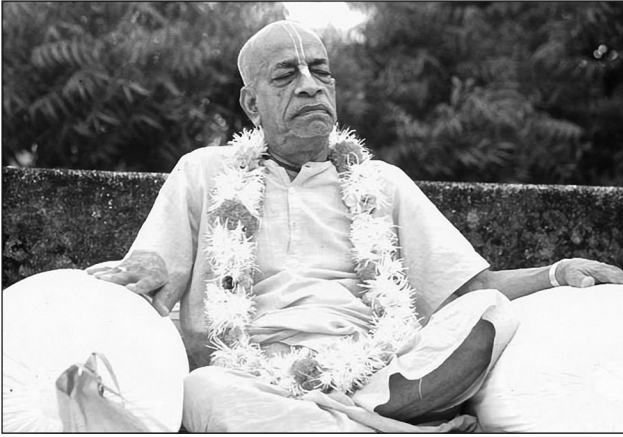
BLASPHEMING A SAINTLY PERSON IS DEADLY

Srila Vishvanatha Chakravarti Thakura



THE TRANSCENDENTAL PASTIMES OF LORD KRISHNA

Conversation between Sri Narada Muni and Sri Vedavyas



WHO IS A MAHĀ-BHĀGAVATA?

*His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta
Swami Prabhupada*

Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Thakura says that if an observer immediately remembers the holy name of Krishna upon seeing a Vaishnava, that Vaishnava should be considered a *mahā-bhāgavata*, a first-class devotee. Such a Vaishnava is always aware of his Krishna conscious duty, and he is enlightened in self-realization. He is always in love with the Supreme Personality of Godhead, Krishna, and this love is without adulteration. Because of this love, he is always awake to transcendental realization. Because he knows that Krishna consciousness is the basis of knowledge and action, he sees everything as being connected with Krishna. Such a person is able to chant the holy name of Krishna perfectly. Such a *mahā-bhāgavata* Vaishnava has the transcendental eyes to see who is sleeping under the spell of *māyā*, and he engages himself in awakening sleeping conditioned beings by spreading the knowledge of Krishna consciousness. He opens eyes that are closed by forgetfulness of Krishna. Thus the living entity is liberated from the dullness of material energy and is engaged fully in the service of the Lord. The *madhyama-adhikārī* Vaishnava can awaken others to Krishna consciousness and engage them in duties whereby they can advance. It is therefore said in the *Caitanya-caritāmṛta* (Madhya-līlā, Chapter Six, verse 279):

*lohāke yāvat sparśi' hema nāhi kare
tāvat sparśa-maṇi keha cinīte nā pāre*

“One cannot understand the value of touchstone until it turns iron into gold.” One should judge by action, not by promises.

A *mahā-bhāgavata* can turn a living entity from abominable material life to the Lord's service. This is the test of a *mahā-bhāgavata*. Although preaching is not meant for a *mahā-bhāgavata*, a *mahā-bhāgavata* can descend to the platform of *madhyama-bhāgavata* just to convert others to Vaishnavism. Actually a *mahā-*

nityaṁ bhāgavata-sevayā

bhāgavata is fit to spread Krishna consciousness, but he does not distinguish where Krishna consciousness should be spread from where it should not. He thinks that everyone is competent to accept Krishna consciousness if the chance is provided. A neophyte and an intermediate devotee should always be eager to hear the *mahā-bhāgavata* and serve him in every respect. The neophyte and intermediate devotees can gradually rise to the platform of *uttama-adhikārī* and become first-class devotees. Symptoms of a first-class devotee are given in *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* (11.2.45):

*sarva-bhūteṣu yaḥ paśyed bhagavad-bhāvam ātmanah
bhūtāni bhagavatī ātmany eṣa bhāgavatottamaḥ*

“The most advanced devotee sees within everything the soul of all souls, the Supreme Personality of Godhead, Sri Krishna. Consequently, he sees systematically everything in relation to the Supreme Lord and understands that everything that exists is eternally situated within the Lord.”

When teaching Sanatana Goswami, the Lord further said:

*śāstra-yuktye sunipūṇa, dṛḍha-śraddhā yānra
'uttama-adhikārī' se tārāye saṁsāra*

“One who is expert in the Vedic literature and has full faith in the Supreme Lord is an *uttama-adhikārī*, a first-class Vaishnava, a topmost Vaishnava who can deliver the whole world and turn everyone to Krishna consciousness.” (*Caitanya-caritāmṛta*, Madhya 22.65)

With great love and affection, the *mahā-bhāgavata* observes the Supreme Personality of Godhead, devotional service and the devotee. He observes nothing beyond Krishna, Krishna consciousness and Krishna's devotees. The *mahā-bhāgavata* knows that everyone is engaged in the Lord's service in different ways. He therefore descends to the middle platform to elevate everyone to the Krishna conscious position.

— *Caitanya-caritāmṛta*, Madhya Lila 16.74, Purport

DID HUMANS CREATE RELIGION?

*Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Thakur
Prabhupada*

Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam (6.3.19) states:

*dharmam tu sāṅsād bhagavat-praṇītaṁ,
na vai vidur ṛṣayo nāpi devā
na siddha-mukhyā asurā manuṣyāḥ,
kuto nu vidyādhara-cāraṇādāya*

Real religious principles are enacted by the Supreme Personality of Godhead. Although fully situated in the mode of goodness, even the great ṛṣis, who occupy the topmost planets, cannot ascertain the real religious principles, nor can the demigods or the leaders of Siddhaloka, to say nothing of the asuras, ordinary human beings, Vidyadharas and Caranas.

The supreme religious principles, *bhāgavata-dharma*, were not created by humans, nor were they created after the creation of human beings. They are eternal and will continue to be eternal, unchangeable, and uninterrupted. Devotional service to Lord Hari is the religious principle. Apart from bhakti, all other concocted religious systems that have been, are, and will be preached in this world, are manmade temporary religions, religions opposed to the supreme religious principle. *Bhāgavata-dharma*, *param-dharma*, or *ātmā-dharma* cannot be merged with the religion of the body. Therefore Lord Sri Krishna instructs us in *Bhagavad-gītā* to give up all varieties of religion and surrender unto Him. *Bhagavad-gītā* (18.66) states:

*sarva-dharmānparityajya,
mām ekaṁ śaraṇaṁ vraja
ahaṁ tvāṁ sarva-pāpe bhyo,
mokṣa yiśyāmi māśucaḥ:*

“Abandon all varieties of religion and just surrender unto Me. I shall deliver you from all sinful reactions. Do not fear.”

Bhāgavata-dharma is the spirit soul's eternal propensity. The spirit soul was present even before the creation of human beings. Devotional service, which is the eternal propensity of the eternal spirit soul, is also eternal. The true religious process or *sādhana* is that which awakens the spirit soul's constitutional propensity. It is the function of worldly moralities to transform animal-like humans into proper humans, but *bhāgavata-dharma* is above this. Cultivation of *bhāgavata-dharma* is eternally necessary to award the living entities the complete qualification to engage in the Supreme Lord's service. *Bhāgavata-dharma* makes no arrangement for sense gratification. It consists in cent-percent eternal service to the transcendental Lord. This is the only way to attain actual happiness, unlimited pleasure.

We should know that voxpopuli is not the same as voxdei, but the word of God should be the word of the people. Popular opinion is not the same as God's opinion, although the Supreme Lord's opinion should be the opinion of pious people. This is what the *mahājanas* instruct. People who mix spirit with matter say just the opposite.

They say, *yata mata tata pata*: “As many opinions, as many ways.” How amazing! The popular voice should be the voice of the Supreme Lord! People think that the process of attaining Him, where every popular opinion is given equal credence, should be as highly regarded as love and devotion to the Supreme Lord, even though in those processes devotion is totally absent. Wherever popular opinion is the criteria for ascertaining the Absolute Truth, non-duplicious truth is far from being realized.

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BLASPHEMING A SAINTLY PERSON IS DEADLY

Srila Vishvanatha Chakravartī Thakura

Blaspheming means to be envious of, and antagonistic towards, the saintly devotee. If one even accidentally commits this offence against a Vaishnava he must bitterly repent of his low behavior. Just as poison is counteracted by poison, similarly, the offender, having set aflame his spiritual life with blasphemy, must be purified in the fire of contrition. The offender must go and fall at the feet of the devotee he reviled and beg forgiveness until he is again able to please that Vaishnava. He must approach the devotee with trepidation in his heart and think that by pleading, praising, offering repeated obeisances, or by any means he must satisfy the offended devotee. Yet, if for some reason he is unable to appease the devotee then the offender must continue to serve him for many days in a way that will impress and satisfy him. In case the offence is of such a serious nature that the Vaishnava's ire remains unpacified, then the offender must strongly condemn his own abominable action and think, “Oh, how shameful! I have blasphemed a Vaiṣṇava! I shall have to suffer millions of years in the fire of hell.”

With a heavy heart, the aparadhi must then take complete shelter of the holy name and chant incessantly, knowing this to be his only hope. The holy name of Krishna is all-powerful and can absolve any offence, however serious. The offender may incorrectly think, “If this is true about chanting, then why should I have to fall at the Vaishnava's feet in such a humble manner and demean myself? After all the scriptures ensure that for one who commits *nāma-aparādha* chanting on its own will clear away all offences, hence I shall certainly be again pardoned.” Such thinking is incorrect. Instead,

the offender becomes enmeshed in another heinous *nāma-aparādha*, that of committing sin on the strength of chanting the holy name.

The offender may once again try to rationalize his misbehavior by saying, “According to the scriptures (*Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* 11.11.29) only those who are compassionate, peaceful, and tolerant are called *sādhus*, or saintly persons. Therefore, the offence of blaspheming a devotee is appropriate only when someone who possesses these characteristics is criticized, not for one who has not developed these qualities.

In reply, the scriptures state that even if reprobates, cheaters, hypocrites, pretenders, outcastes, and worse take up devotional service, needless to say they are still considered to be *sādhus*. They must not be criticized for their past, however terrible it may have been, and they cannot be barred from being accepted as Vaishnava devotees nor can their devotion be deprecated. The *śāstra* further declares that if a *mahā-bhāgavata*, or an elevated pure devotee, is offended, he simply brushes aside the entire episode because he possesses immense compassion, and he will not acknowledge the behavior as an offence. As for the guilty party, he must fall at the sadhu's feet and beg forgiveness so that his heart may be purified. We learn from the *śāstra* and the *sādhus* that even if the *mahā-bhāgavata* effortlessly tolerates the foolish person's blasphemy, his followers cannot bear this atrocity; they punish the offender by wishing him to suffer appropriately for his offence.

The pure devotees are incorruptible and independent in thought. They do not require a reason to shower their causeless mercy on any soul, however wretched he may be. Sometimes they display great magnanimity by showing profound mercy to a downright offender and harsh critic. At the same time they are not swayed by praise in order to make them act compassionately. The story of the elevated devotee Jada Bharat is a good example. King Rahugana once engaged Jada Bharat to carry his palanquin. After going some way, the king began to rudely criticize Jada Bharata who simply showered him with mercy. In another incident, the atheistic Daityas were very offensive to Uparicara Vasu, the King of Cedi. A third example is that of the despicable Madhai who threw a stone at Lord Nityananda, causing His forehead to bleed profusely, yet the Lord showed him causeless mercy. The same principle is applied to another offence against the holy name that of disobeying the orders of the spiritual master.

— *The Third Shower of Nectar, Madhurya- Kadambini,*

Translated by Sarvabhāvana dāsa ❧

THE TRANSCENDENTAL PASTIMES OF LORD KRISHNA

Conversation between

Sri Narada Muni and Sri Vyasa-dev

Sri Narada said: You have not actually broadcast the sublime and spotless glories of the Personality of Godhead. That philosophy which does not satisfy the transcendental senses of the Lord is considered worthless. Although, great sage, you have very broadly described the four principles beginning with religious performances, you have not described the glories of the Supreme Personality, *Vāsudeva*. Those words which do not describe the glories of the Lord, who alone can sanctify the atmosphere of the whole universe, are considered by saintly persons to be like unto a place of pilgrimage for crows. Since the all-perfect persons are inhabitants of the transcendental abode, they do not derive any pleasure there.

On the other hand, that literature which is full of descriptions of the transcendental glories of the name, fame, forms, pastimes, etc., of the unlimited Supreme Lord is a different creation, full of transcendental words directed toward bringing about a revolution in the impious lives of this world's misdirected civilization. Such transcendental literatures, even though imperfectly composed, are heard, sung and accepted by purified men who are thoroughly honest. Knowledge of self-realization, even though free from all material affinity, does not look well if devoid of a conception of the Infalible [God]. What, then, is the use of fruitive activities, which are naturally painful from the very beginning and transient by nature, if they are not utilized for the devotional service of the Lord?

O Vyasa-dev, your vision is completely perfect. Your good fame is spotless. You are firm in vow and situated in truthfulness. And thus you can think of the pastimes of the Lord in trance for the liberation of the people in general from all material bondage. Whatever you desire to describe that is separate in vision from the Lord simply reacts, with different forms, names and results, to agitate the mind as the wind agitates a boat which has no resting place. The people in general are naturally inclined to enjoy, and you have encouraged them in that way in the name of religion. This is verily condemned and is quite unreasonable. Because they are guided under your instructions, they will accept such activities in the name of religion and will hardly care for prohibitions.

The Supreme Lord is unlimited. Only a very expert personality, retired from the activities of material happiness, deserves to understand this knowledge of spiritual



values. Therefore those who are not so well situated, due to material attachment, should be shown the ways of transcendental realization, by Your Goodness, through descriptions of the transcendental activities of the Supreme Lord. One who has forsaken his material occupations to engage in the devotional service of the Lord may sometimes fall down while in an immature stage, yet there is no danger of his being unsuccessful.

On the other hand, a nondevotee, though fully engaged in occupational duties, does not gain anything. Persons who are actually intelligent and philosophically inclined should endeavor only for that purposeful end which is not obtainable even by wandering from the topmost planet [Brahmaloka] down to the lowest planet [Pātāla]. As far as happiness derived from sense enjoyment is concerned, it can be obtained automatically in course of time, just as in course of time we obtain miseries even though we do not desire them. My dear Vyasa, even though a devotee of Lord Krishna sometimes falls down somehow or other, he certainly does not undergo material existence like others [fruitive workers, etc.] because a person who has once relished the taste of the lotus feet of the Lord can do nothing but remember that ecstasy again and again.

The Supreme Lord, Personality of Godhead is Himself this cosmos, and still He is aloof from

it. From Him only has this cosmic manifestation emanated, in Him it rests, and unto Him it enters after annihilation. Your good self knows all about this. I have given only a synopsis. Your Goodness has perfect vision. You yourself can know the Supersoul Personality of Godhead because you are present as the plenary portion of the Lord. Although you are birthless, you have appeared on this earth for the well-being of all people. Please, therefore, describe the transcendental pastimes of the Supreme Personality of Godhead Sri Krishna more vividly. Learned circles have positively concluded that the infallible purpose of the advancement of knowledge, namely austerities, study of the Vedas, sacrifice, chanting of hymns and charity, culminates in the transcendental descriptions of the Lord, who is defined in choice poetry.

— Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam 1.5.8 -22



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